


Resilience After Trauma in Kosovo and Southeastern Europe: A Scoping Review

TRAUMA, VIOLENCE, & ABUSE
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Abstract

Most people who experience trauma want to thrive and often find paths to well-being and healthy functioning. This scoping review explores the existing evidence on adversity and resilience in southeastern European countries, focusing on Kosovo. There is a lack of research on trauma and resilience in cultures outside the US and Western Europe. The paper provides a brief cultural and historical overview of this region and the collectivist cultures found there. We draw from a range of interdisciplinary literatures to identify key strengths that have the potential to improve health outcomes for trauma victims in this region. Overall, 42 papers from PsycInfo and PubMed were identified, using keywords such as “resilience” or “health” and “Kosovo,” “Balkans,” and “Southeastern Europe.” Findings from this scoping review show that different cultural values, norms, and societal ecologies impact resilience within these societies. Some strengths, such as social support and sense of purpose, echoed similar research in the US and Western Europe. There was also evidence that factors such as dignity, family solidarity, social activism, and nationwide meaning-making are strengths associated with resilience for these collectivist societies of southeastern Europe. We also consider the implications of the results for other post-conflict societies. Finally, findings from this review call for culturally sensitive strength-based perspectives in promoting health and well-being after the high dosages of trauma common in this region.

Keywords

resilience, trauma, Kosovo, southeastern Europe, strengths, health

Introduction

There is robust evidence on the association between exposure to trauma and negative psychological and physical health consequences (e.g., Gilbert et al., 2015). Despite well-documented harms, resilience is also often present in the aftermath of trauma. Most people who experience trauma want to thrive and often find paths to well-being and healthy functioning (Bonnano, 2004; Hamby et al., 2018; Ungar, 2013). People in southeastern Europe (SE) have recently been exposed to the trauma of war and many structural changes at the societal level, representing a unique and compelling context that is notably understudied in the resilience and trauma literatures. The resilience portfolio model defines resilience as a process of positive adaption which uses individual, family, and community strengths to ensure health and growth after adversity (Grych et al., 2015). Although evidence indicates that many strengths can help people thrive after trauma, research evidence shows cultural differences in how people and societies deal with trauma and recovery (Hinton et al., 2015; Hinton et al., 2016; Hinton & Kirmayer, 2013; Kirmayer & Pedersen, 2014). It is critical to understand positive adaption in the aftermath of trauma through a cultural lens (Berger, 2015; Weiss & Berger, 2010). Moreover, there is

a need to understand positive adaption and resilience in cultures outside North America and Western Europe, where much resilience and trauma research has been conducted. Therefore, this scoping review examines the existing empirical evidence on trauma and resilience in southeastern European countries, with a particular focus on Kosovo.

Understanding Resilience After Trauma

Individuals across their lifetimes experience adversities ranging from minor to severe and many of them manage to overcome these experiences, using individual, family, and community assets and resources (Grych et al., 2015; Hamby et al., 2018; Ungar, 2008). The concept of resilience shifts the focus of scholarship away from deficit-based models that

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focus on risk factors and consequences of victimization and other traumatic experiences and instead emphasizes the strengths that people can harness to overcome trauma (Luthar et al., 2000; Richardson, 2002).

There is an ongoing debate among scholars in terms of the definition of resilience as a trait, process, or outcome. Although some early scholarship considered resilience as an individual trait or outcome (Luthar et al., 2000), most scholars now consider resilience as a process (Bonnano, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007; Hamby et al., 2018; Masten, 2011; Rutter, 2012). The view of resilience as a process incorporates individuals as well as their social ecological contexts, and how these all dynamically contribute to influence outcomes (Davydov et al., 2010; Ungar, 2008). According to Hamby et al. (2018), understanding resilience requires three elements, including the traumatic experiences to be overcome, protective factors or strengths as mechanisms to overcome trauma, and evidence of healthy functioning after trauma, such as low symptoms or high posttraumatic growth. In the resilience portfolio model, individual assets and external resources contribute to a *portfolio* of strengths, including a concept called *poly-strengths*, which is the total number of strengths that people have at above-average levels. Research evidence shows that some strengths are more important to resilience than others (Hamby et al., 2018), and these are grouped into three key domains. *Regulatory strengths* are related to the capability of individuals to control and manage emotions and behaviors. *Interpersonal strengths* include the resources of family, friends, and community. The third domain is *meaning-making strengths*, which are related to individuals' capacity to connect to something larger than themselves and includes a sense of purpose, spirituality, and related constructs.

These strengths domains have been associated with thriving after adversity in diverse age groups such as youth, adults, and the elderly (Hamby et al., 2016, 2018; Hamby, Schultz, & Elm, 2020). One U.S. study showed significant associations between strengths such as emotion regulation, meaning-making, social support, and forgiveness with physical well-being (Banyard et al., 2017). In another study conducted with U.S. youth who reported high rates of victimization, sense of purpose was the strength most associated with better mental health (Hamby, Taylor et al., 2020). A Canadian study showed that despite high rates of trauma, youth who demonstrated strengths related to behavioral and control coping, parental support, self-esteem, and optimism showed lower distress after trauma (Moisan et al., 2019). A Spanish study found that sense of purpose, coping, psychological endurance, and density of strengths were significantly associated with improved outcomes among victims of intimate partner violence (Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2021).

Although these and other studies have supported the social ecological approach to resilience emphasized in the resilience portfolio model, to date, research on resilience portfolios—and most other research on resilience—has been limited to North America and Western Europe, and there is a need to

extend the study of the impact of cultural contexts and situational factors. In this paper, we expand the resilience portfolio model to the context of southeastern Europe, with a focus on the country of Kosovo. This collaborative endeavor represents an example of how experience and knowledge from a Western country combined with the local understanding of context could provide a firm ground for understanding resilience in non-Western countries and contribute to more diverse science.

The Social Ecology of Kosovo and Neighboring Communities

Kosovo is situated in southeastern Europe in territory formerly belonging to Yugoslavia. The region of approximately two million people has been an independent nation since 2008. The politically new country is also demographically young, with an average age of 29 years and around 40% of the population is under 25 (World Bank, 2020). In contrast, the average age of many European countries is above 40 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2019). Kosovo is majority Albanian (88%), 7% Serb, and the remaining 5% primarily from other Eastern European groups (Bosniaks, Turks, Ashkali, Egyptian, and Roma or RAE; Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2012; Maloku et al., 2017).

Kosovo and the other nations of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia) are still deeply affected by the inter-ethnic political conflicts which erupted in many wars in the 1990s. Kosovo, like these neighboring countries, experienced severe repression and violations of human rights during the Milosevic regime in 1990s Yugoslavia, including ethnic segregation, removal or resignation of many Kosovars from state jobs, and school and university closures (Baliqi, 2017; Kelmendi et al., 2020; Maloku et al., 2017; Malcolm, 1998). The war during 1998–1999 resulted in more than one million refugees in surrounding countries, approximately 20,000 dead, and more than 17,000 missing (Hajrullahu, 2020; International Committee of the Red Cross -ICRC, 2018; Kelmendi et al., 2020; Maloku et al., 2017).

Primary research after the war documented that people in Kosovo and other southeastern European countries showed many symptoms of psychological distress and poor mental health, including posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, physical pain, anxiety, and depression (Ahern et al., 2004; Cardozo et al., 2003; Fanaj & Melonashi, 2017; Ringdal & Ringdal, 2016; Spiegel & Salama, 2000; Turner et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2010). Prevalence rates of mental disorders in war-affected regions across Balkan countries were substantially higher than those for non-war-affected populations (Priebe et al., 2010) and health inequalities are present throughout the countries of former Yugoslavia (Eikemo et al., 2010).

In the aftermath of the war, Kosovo had scarce mental health resources; thus, family and kin networks served as main supports for people with mental health issues (Agani et al.,

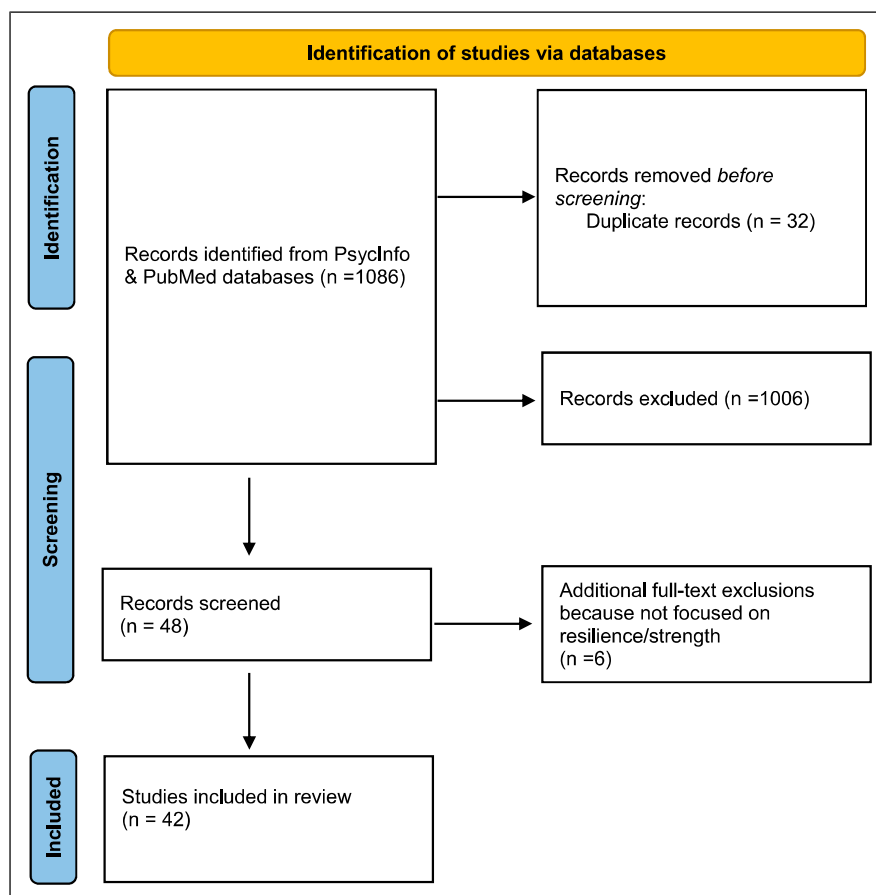


Figure 1. Flow diagram of search for review.

2010; [Weine et al., 2005](#)). Today, Kosovo, similar to many other post-conflict societies, is still facing consequences of war and trauma, including the intergenerational effects of trauma ([Priebe et al., 2010](#); [Schick et al., 2013](#)) and continuing violence in many domains of social life ([Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2021](#); [Kostovicova et al., 2020](#)). Most adolescents in Kosovo have been exposed to many adverse experiences with potential long-term health consequences, including corporal punishment, psychological violence, witnessing inter-parental violence, and other hostilities ([Arënliu et al., 2021](#); [Kelmendi et al., 2019](#); [UNICEF, 2015](#); [2019](#)). In a recent study of 12 municipalities with more than 12,000 students in 6–9th grade, high rates of peer violence were reported, including 73% reporting some physical and psychological violence and 25% reporting sexual harassment ([Arënliu et al., 2021](#)).

Resilience in Kosovo and Southeastern Europe: A Review of Evidence

Although available evidence shows high prevalence rates of violence and mental health issues in the Kosovars context, only a few studies have explored resilience ([Arënliu et al., 2019](#); [Kelmendi et al., 2020](#); [Kijewski & Freitag, 2018](#)). This

reflects a general limitation of the resilience literature, which has often been studied in North America or western European countries (so-called Western Educated Industrialized Rich and Democratic or WEIRD countries), but seldom in Eastern Europe ([Henrich et al., 2010](#)). To that end, we conducted a scoping review of the literature on resilience in this region.

Methodology

For this scoping review, we completed a literature search of PsycInfo and PubMed. Our initial search terms for this scoping review were “resilience” searched with each of the following: “Kosovo,” “Balkans,” “Albania*,” and “south-eastern Europe.” In our search, we adapted the following exclusion criteria. We excluded publications that (1) represent secondary sources or other nonempirical papers, (2) only tangentially mention Kosovo or southeastern Europe, (3) were published in a language other than English, or (4) comprised samples of other nationalities (e.g., foreign military personnel serving in Kosovo). We set no date limits on our search. As can be seen in [Figure 1](#), we found only seven empirical studies that mentioned resilience in Kosovo. Expanding our search to include Albania, Balkans, and southeastern Europe increased

the total to 24. To expand our search further, we added a search for “health” and “Kosovo,” this time requiring in addition to the above criteria that the paper include some measure of psychosocial strengths or coping. This yielded an additional 24 papers. After full-text review, we excluded six additional papers, resulting in 42 for this scoping review. In the reference section, these 42 papers are marked with an asterisk. The studies represented a range of methodologies, especially surveys, focus groups, and interviews, but most of them were cross-sectional studies that only collected data at a single point in time. There were five studies that focused on interventions.

Resilience Portfolios in Kosovo and Southeastern Europe

We have organized the results into the three resilience portfolio domains, regulatory, interpersonal, and meaning-making, but we acknowledge that these assets and resources are interconnected and when available, provide some information on those interconnections. A summary of the key findings is in [Table 1](#).

Regulatory Strengths

Regulatory strengths include different dimensions of impulse control, emotion regulation, and psychological endurance. Although these regulatory processes involve individual strengths, they depend on the socioecological context of the individual and co-exist within relationships that individuals create with others and their broader context ([Ford & Mauss, 2015](#)). Research evidence demonstrates that culture shapes how individuals think, feel, and behave ([Hofstede, 2001](#)) and frames the motivation to regulate and adapt ([De Leersnyder et al., 2013](#); [Ford & Mauss, 2015](#); [Kitayama et al., 2006](#); [Mesquita & Leu, 2007](#)). For example, cultures that value independence and autonomy often promote positive emotions, arousal, and excitement. In contrast, people in cultures that promote interdependence, connectedness, and commitment are often more focused on preventing negative emotions

([Butler et al., 2007](#); [Elliot et al., 2013](#)). Kosovo is a predominantly collectivist society, and thus, regulatory strengths can be examined in terms of a culture that values interdependence. The culture of Kosovo promotes honor, dignity, respect, good behavior, and hospitality ([Hoxha & Maksutaj, 2017](#)). Although these characteristics are generally viewed positively in most cultures, they are particularly central to Kosovar culture.

In Kosovo, honor and dignity have been associated with the need to stand and endorse toughness and endurance while still caring and relying upon others. [Arënliu and Landsman \(2010\)](#) argue that acceptance of suffering as an inherent aspect of life, related to the regulatory strength of psychological endurance, helped Kosovars overcome hard times and experience growth after adversity (p. 71). Similarly, many respondents in one study mentioned patience and self-awareness as mechanisms of their emotional suppression, although highly associated with the meaning they gave to these experiences ([Kelmendi et al., 2020](#)).

These regulatory strengths were also evident in studies conducted with refugee families from Kosovo. Evidence indicates that most Kosovar families responded flexibly in distributing roles and functions and established stability and endurance during their experiences as refugees. This process and experiences served as pathways for maintaining the honor of their families and, at the same time, contributed to their resilience ([Becker et al., 2000](#); [Walsh, 2002](#); [Weine, 2008](#)). Correspondingly, Kosovar refugees demonstrated coping, another regulatory strength ([Ai et al., 2007](#)). Notably, findings show that they had the strength to process, compare, and find alternative solutions to their problems, despite the trauma that they experienced. One study found that Kosovar refugees also showed the capability to shift from negative ruminations to more positive ways of thinking, representing another aspect of growth in terms of cognitive-emotional processing after trauma ([Joseph & Linley, 2005](#)). Another study conducted with Kosovar refugees in the USA found that distinct regulatory dimensions were associated with resilience ([Rioli et al., 2002](#)). Specifically, control coping, defined as an individual’s

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings.

There are high rates of war trauma and other forms of victimization in Kosovo and surrounding countries.
There is a lack of research on resilience and strengths in cultures outside the US and Western Europe, specifically in Kosovo and neighboring countries in southeastern Europe.
For regulatory strengths, several studies identified emotion regulation and endurance as key strengths that promote resilience after adversity, consistent with literature from other regions.
More specifically to this region, several studies pointed to the importance of dignity, honor, and related regulatory capacities for Kosovo and southeastern Europe.
Social support was associated with better functioning after trauma, consistent with the literature from other regions on interpersonal strengths that support thriving after trauma.
Interpersonal strengths that appear to be particularly important in Kosovo and southeastern Europe include family solidarity and social collectivism.
In addition, nationwide meaning-making and identity formation processes after the wars were also found to be important for recovery from trauma in Kosovo and neighboring countries.

effort to reduce stress, be proactive, and problem solve, was positively associated with resilience and lower levels of distress.

Similarly, personal agency and family hardiness contributed to better adaptation and higher academic achievement in a recent study with immigrant adolescents from Albania to Greece (Anagnostaki et al., 2016; Motti-Stefanidi, 2015; Rukaj, 2020). Agency and persistence were also important strengths of many immigrant women from Albania to Greece who overcame the typical narrative of migration, avoiding despair and hopelessness and managing to succeed, even without support (Christou & Michail, 2015). Similarly, women's endurance and persistence during the pre- and post-war periods symbolized strength and hope in Kosovar families through social activism and resistance (Ramsey, 2017).

Furthermore, Kosovo students who experienced different forms of victimization reported several strengths that were associated with posttraumatic growth and subjective well-being (Kelmendi & Hoxha, 2021). Particularly, students who experienced peer violence reported a significant association between outcomes (posttraumatic growth or subjective well-being) and several regulatory strengths, including anger management, emotion awareness, and endurance.

Interpersonal Strengths

Another essential aspect of resilience after adversity is associated with support from families and the community. In collectivist societies, where individuals define themselves as part of a larger, interdependent group, people describe their goals, needs, and value as defined within the group (Ellemers et al., 2004). Exposure to trauma and adversity in predominantly collectivist societies is associated with increased group cohesion, solidarity, and social activism (Lykes et al., 2007).

Thriving after trauma (resilience) is associated with several interpersonal strengths in Kosovo and other southeastern European countries. For example, existing data show that collective responses, such as communal coping and participation in social gatherings, are positively associated with posttraumatic growth and social well-being (Gasparre et al., 2010; Włodarczyk et al., 2016).

Kosovo and many other cultures of southeastern Europe are collectivist societies, where solid ties and family solidarity within and across generations are essential family issues and obligations (Latifi, 2019). In this context, connectedness and responsiveness toward a family member, loyalty, and support to others serve a purpose and are considered crucial to overall well-being (Latifi, 2015). Families promote resilience by adapting their roles and obligations, showing flexibility, and promoting togetherness. Strategies include maintaining connectedness with extended family (for refugees, especially maintaining contacts with relatives still in the region), sharing good memories, and teaching children about the history and language to strengthen their ethnic identity (Weine, 2008).

Findings from the survey conducted by Arënlju et al. (2019) with families with missing persons showed that social support received from family, friends, and significant others was positively related to posttraumatic growth. Likewise, individuals who were actively involved with community organizations reported higher rates of posttraumatic growth in comparison with others. Kelmendi et al. (2020) showed that war experiences and adversity increased compassion, empathy, and altruism, all interpersonal strengths. These strengths increased the sense of purpose and helped them overcome their adversity (Kelmendi et al., 2020). Additionally, research evidence in Kosovo shows that the elderly who maintained family and social ties reported better health status than those with few contacts (Jerliu et al., 2014).

Similar findings are evident in many southeastern European countries. Results have shown that family and community support served as resources and helped overcome adversity in these post-conflict contexts (Ajdukovic et al., 2013; Jerliu et al., 2014; Landau et al., 2008; Nakayama et al., 2014; Walsh, 2007; Walsh, 2002). Feeling of belongingness and support of locals was considered key strength for Albanian refugees in Greece and Malaysia (Vathi & Duci, 2016; Thartori & Ismail, 2021). Similar findings were obtained after the 2014 European floods in Croatia: connectedness between community members, trust, and mutual helping increased well-being and decreased symptoms of distress (Bakic & Ajdukovic, 2019).

Findings from intervention studies conducted in the aftermath of the Kosovo war consider family resilience as a crucial concept for refugees, particularly the youth (Weine, 2008; Walsh, 2002). Notably, the presence of respected elders (in many cases, they are grandparents in Kosovar families) was another resource that helped maintain stability, providing a positive perspective and a sense of purpose to these experiences. Older family members typically feel obligations and duty to remain strong and stable in front of younger relatives and become role models of resilience, finding purpose to help overcome their adverse experiences. In the recent study conducted with Kosovar students mentioned above, social support was significantly associated with posttraumatic growth and subjective well-being for those who experienced peer or domestic violence (Kelmendi et al., 2020).

Meaning-Making Strengths

Meaning-making strengths represent another crucial dimension of the resilience portfolio model. Meaning-making comes from connecting to something larger than oneself, such as committing to a goal or purpose, a role such as parent or teacher, or a religious or spiritual faith. Meaning-making is also related to the interpretation that individuals give to their adverse experiences and how they make sense of these events to maintain coherence between their values and beliefs and the adverse events that they experience (Hamby et al., 2018). Research evidence shows that negative experiences might

produce a more significant impact if they challenge individuals' core beliefs (Can et al., 2010); therefore, people engage in meaning-making to reduce the discrepancy that they are experiencing (Park, 2013). Moreover, research indicates that some ways of meaning-making happen at the intrapersonal and the interpersonal levels (Nadeau, 2008; Park, 2010). Particularly, some form of meaning-making could be related to a relatively broader concept, such as community or nationwide meaning-making, that reflects the socioecological context. It is essential to emphasize that cultural values and social norms shape meaning-making.

In the Kosovar context, meaning-making processes were crucial in the aftermath of war and other traumas. These meaning-making processes were related to the developmental age in which individuals were during the war and subsequent founding of the new state, and the socio-cultural context in which they grew and lived (Kelmendi et al., 2020). All the respondents in the previously mentioned study discussed the optimism regarding the newly created state, improvement of quality of life, independence and freedom, and hope for a better future. The sense of purpose was another way they tried to give meaning by developing stable institutions and governments to create a better life. The concept of community social cohesion is strongly related to meaning-making strengths, and we could argue the interdependence of strengths also in this diverse socio-cultural context. Similarly, the Kelmendi et al. study of Kosovar youth (2020) showed that meaning-making strengths, including sense of purpose and religiosity, were associated with better outcomes among youth who experienced peer or domestic violence.

During these times of societal upheaval since the Kosovo War, an interview-based study found that Kosovar parents try to give meaning through care for themselves and their families and respect for moral and social norms (Kelmendi et al., 2020). Many have been preoccupied with sustaining housing and other basic needs, as well as ensuring quality of life for their families and protecting traditional values. Additionally, religious beliefs and practices combined with a strong sense of forming the nation served as meaning-making strategies.

Another important meaning-making strength in the Kosovar population is hope. Research evidence shows that hope, that is, the perception that one has the means to thrive in the future (whether or not this perception is illusory), seems to be a crucial motivator for Kosovar war refugees to overcome the horrific experiences of war (Ai et al., 2002, 2007). In a study with Kosovar refugees in Albania (Rioli et al., 2002), optimism and hope for positive outcomes were positively associated with resilience. Another study (Ai et al., 2007) showed that education mediated the relationship between hope and outcomes for Kosovar refugees in USA. Specifically, refugees with higher educational attainment reported more hope and posttraumatic growth since they had confidence in their intellectual resources for overcoming challenges. These findings are consistent with multi-country studies showing that

optimism is a key resilience strength (World Happiness Report, 2019).

Implications for Research, Prevention, and Intervention

The high rates of trauma in Kosovo and throughout southeastern Europe, due to the wars of the 1990s and other problems, have significant psychological and physical health impacts, but there is evidence for a variety of pathways to helping people overcome these burdens. Resilience portfolio domains are not meant to be prescriptive but rather help point people in different cultural contexts to the strengths needed to help people overcome trauma.

Although this was the first comprehensive review of resilience research in Kosovo and southeastern Europe, some limitations need to be acknowledged prior to considering implications. Only papers published in the English language were included, considering that most of the scientific papers from this region are published in English and that allowed both authors to review the work. However, review of evidence published in local languages could enhance future work. Also, it is possible that some relevant work was not identified.

Research Implications

In terms of research implications, the resilience portfolio model calls for the study of underappreciated strengths of marginalized regions, and more study is needed on the key strengths of Kosovars and other southeastern European cultures (see Table 2 for a summary of the implications). This scoping review suggests several factors that need more research to better understand the cultural context of resilience in Kosovo and neighboring communities. First, the countries in this region have predominantly collectivist cultures, and most resilience research has been on individualistic cultures such as those in western Europe and North America. Several measures of collectivism exist and could be better integrated into research on resilience. Fundamental Kosovar values include honor, dignity, respect, good behavior, and hospitality. These kinds of values have received comparatively little study, and this is another area for research growth. In previous work with the resilience portfolio model, concepts similar to hospitality, such as deriving meaning from family traditions, showed signs of being a strength but also suggested some element of caregiver burden, and this would need further study in the collectivist context. The concept of dignity is scarce in resilience research. It has been explored mainly among Palestinians (Hammad & Tribe, 2021; Marie et al., 2018; Ryan, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to explore dignity in southeastern countries of Europe further and understand its contribution to resilience.

The cultural complexities call for mixed-method research designs, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Table 2. Summary of Key Implications.

We need more research on strengths in collectivist cultures and integration of existing measures of collectivism in trauma and resilience research.
Several important psychosocial strengths in Kosovo and southeastern Europe need more study, including honor, dignity, hospitality, family solidarity, social activism, and nationwide meaning-making.
We recommend mixed-method research designs and qualitative approaches to uncover further unique aspects of the social ecology of this region.
Communities in this region often have relatively low resources due to ongoing recovery from the war and ongoing economic issues. Thus, we recommend incorporating existing institutions, such as schools, as forums to promote resilience.
Interventions should focus on families and communities as essential units and use existing family and community rituals and traditions.
Low-cost interventions such as mindfulness and narrative are effective elsewhere and could be tested in these communities.
There is also potential to invest in urban green spaces and other high-quality public spaces to support recreation, physical exercise, and community interaction.
The strength-based perspective in healthcare settings and assessment should be considered for equity-driven healthcare provisions and sustainable changes.

Qualitative research, such as focus groups and interviews, can further understanding about how specific aspects of resilience are perceived and interpreted in specific socio-cultural contexts. Mixed-methods research can help identify unique resilience strengths and understand how strengths are integrated into the cultures of Kosovo and elsewhere in southeastern Europe. Participatory research designs can also help incorporate the local context and citizens' perspectives and experiences. It is likely that new measures may need to be developed, such as ones that capture Kosovar ideas of dignity.

Intervention implications

Southeastern Europeans have high exposure to war and ethnic conflict and need more efforts to help them overcome unusually high dosages of trauma. These efforts also need to consider the low resources in many southeastern European communities. The literature review shows that family members, friends, and group gatherings provided emotional support during southeastern European countries' wars. Notably, strong social (family and friends) ties and social activism were related to better health status and posttraumatic growth in Kosovo (Jerliu et al., 2014; Arenliu et al., 2019) and other southeastern countries (Ajdukovic et al., 2013). Several intervention projects were conducted in Kosovo and other southeastern European countries using the family and community as the focus of their intervention to promote resilience. Notably, projects like Coffee/Tea and Family Education and Support (CAFES & TAFES) and the Linking Human Systems (LINC) approach model evolved through close collaboration between local and international experts by using culturally sensitive strategies and respecting the core values and showed a significant positive impact on the promotion of mental health (Agani et al., 2010; Weine, 2008).

These implications can be considered for other post-conflict societies elsewhere in the world, especially those with collectivist cultures. Existing data suggests some commonalities between the results found in this review and research on other

post-conflict societies. For example, family unity and support were considered crucial dimensions of resilience in the context of the war in Afghanistan families (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010). Strong ties and social networks on post-conflict and post-disaster Indonesia created an opportunity for building resilience among diverse ethnic and religious groups (Guarnacci, 2016). Additionally, findings from post-conflict Sri Lanka, a country with low resources similar to many southeastern European countries, show that community- and school-based programs that promote belongingness and collective efficacy were positively associated with positive mental health (Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013).

Another critical aspect of prevention and intervention for promoting growth and well-being is related to mindfulness and narrative interventions (Manco & Hamby, 2021). Narrative exercises guide participants to write about the most critical and meaningful points of their lives. Mindfulness helps individuals become more self-aware and self-regulated. Evidence shows that some of these interventions are similar or better than other therapies or medication treatments (Bieling et al., 2012; Manco & Hamby, 2021). These interventions are easily implemented in various settings and do not require licensed healthcare providers, and thus hold promise for low- and middle-income countries such as those in southeastern Europe. Findings from a pilot study in Kosovo with adolescents who participated in a six-week mind and body program, which included several strategies such as meditation, biofeedback-guided imagery, movement, and breathing, showed that these children reported a decrease in PTSD symptoms, suggesting the beneficial effects of these kinds of programs may translate to this region (Gordon et al., 2004). Again, showing commonalities with another post-conflict society, mindfulness and yoga classes were demonstrated to be effective in terms of reduction of levels of fear, anger, and sadness among teachers in northern Uganda (Matsuba & Williams, 2020).

Low-resource regions like southeastern Europe can use existing institutions such as schools to promote resilience

and growth through educational workshops or artistic activities. Several school-based projects were organized immediately after the war in Kosovo schools. One of the projects conducted helped children give meaning to their experiences and feelings through art and play (Wertheim-Cahen et al., 2005). Similarly, a community-focused project for fostering psychological well-being and health among children in Kosovo through music education and peer mentorship reported that children who participated in this program for one year reported fewer affective and cognitive disturbances (Gerber et al., 2014). These community-based projects were conducted in close collaboration with local professionals and organizations and contributed to the community's overall health and well-being. Similar findings were obtained from strengths-based intervention projects with children in post-conflict Sierra Leone, where community actions and agency helped promote resilience and strengthen the national child protection system (Wessells, 2016). One more excellent example of the promotion of resilience in schools is the initiative taken to develop a resilience education paradigm, and data from Croatia are promising in terms of increasing children's preparedness toward challenges of the world by identifying their strengths (Miljević-Ridički et al., 2020). Other southeastern European countries could adapt this resilience paradigm due to its benefits and context similarities. Additionally, an intervention study by the Young Men Initiative (YMI) project, which aimed to redefine the norms of masculinity in the southeastern Europe region through educational workshops, showed promising results (Namy et al., 2015). Findings highlight not only that boys were able to internalize new ideas about masculinity, but also the program helped develop self-help practices related to emotion regulation and anger management to promote overall resilience and well-being.

Recently, researchers have developed the urban green space as a conceptual framework that helps in promoting quality of life and resilience. Research evidence shows that the social benefits of urban green spaces range from recreation and increasing physical activities to psychological well-being, social interaction, education, and community building (Nutsford et al., 2013; Rakow & Eells, 2019). Moreover, a latterly developed initiative in Western countries encourages physicians and other healthcare providers to encourage patients to engage in physical activity in green spaces by writing "nature," "park," or "green" prescriptions (Ulmer et al., 2016). Evidence shows that walking or spending time in green spaces is a cost-effective way to improve mental and physical health and helps in reducing stress, anxiety, and mood (Koselka et al., 2019; Leung et al., 2012). Furthermore, research evidence shows that exploration of biological and socio-cultural diversity represents another community-based strategy for developing resilience. Studies exploring the traditional ecological knowledge concerning plants in Albania and Macedonia show that these community-based activities have fostered sustainable

gatherings of the local plants, promoted tighter collaborations between Albanians and Macedonians sharing the same region, and reinforced health benefits (Pieroni et al., 2014; Pieroni et al., 2013; Quave & Pieroni, 2015).

Moreover, the existing review suggests that healthcare providers should employ strengths-based approaches in their screening procedures that involve screening for assets and resources in addition to risk factors and acknowledging a broader historical context of their patients. Research evidence shows that the education of healthcare providers about alternative approaches, including strengths-based approaches, story-telling, and systemic thinking, is essential for equity-driven healthcare provisions and sustainable changes (McKimm et al., 2020).

Finally, the existing review calls for the importance of incorporating the high dosage of trauma due to multiple forms of violence and adversity that people in this region have experienced. Dosage conceptualizations of strengths, such as poly-strengths, could be helpful for promoting individual, family, and socio-cultural factors that support resilience. The portfolio model highlights the range of strengths among individuals and communities in southeastern Europe.

In conclusion, findings from this review provide a basis for advancing our knowledge on resilience and strengths in southeastern Europe and other post-conflict societies. Although we identified some similarities with WEIRD countries, we came across some notable differences in strengths that promote resilience in these countries. For example, strengths related to dignity and honor seem to be very important to resilience in this context. Interventions for high trauma dosage need to be culturally sensitive and promote culturally specific strengths. Secondly, as expected, due to the collectivist nature of these societies, strong family and social ties seem to be a significant resource for promoting and maintaining resilience and strengths. However, in the case of Kosovo, further understanding of factors that promote social activism needs to be investigated. Thirdly, the sense of purpose was one of the critical strengths of meaning making in this context and functioned interdependently with other regulatory and interpersonal strengths in this high trauma dosage context. Finally, findings from this review represent a call for relevant stakeholders to apply culturally sensitive strengths-based perspectives in dealing with resilience after trauma to help individuals, families, and communities to pursue well-being and healthy lives.

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